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World Chronicle

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GUEST: **Amb. Utula Utuoc Samana**
Chairman
United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Committee of 24)

JOURNALISTS: Rob Watson, BBC
Bhaskar Menon, *International Documents Review*

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DECOLONIZATION

In the 50 years since the founding of the United Nations, its membership has expanded from 51 States to 185. Most of the new countries are former colonies. And the success story of decolonization is not over yet. Monitoring current decolonization issues is the United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, usually known as the "Committee of 24". The Chairman of the Committee is Ambassador Utula Utuoc Samana, Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations. He discusses the present state of the decolonization process along with some of the more high profile issues the Committee is dealing with.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

One of the most profound changes on the international scene since World War II has been the process of decolonization. When the United Nations was founded, it had 51 Member States. Today, more than 50 years later, there are 185 members, and most of the new ones are former colonies. And the process of decolonization is by no means completed. Monitoring the situation is the Special Committee on the Implementation of the Declaration on Decolonization, known as "The Committee of 24". Our guest today is the current chairman of the Committee of 24. He is Utula Utuoc Samana, Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Samana are Rob Watson of the BBC and Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review*.

Ambassador Samana, welcome to World Chronicle.

SAMANA: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, first of all, what is a colony? On your Committee you have about 17 countries that I think are classified as colonies, and you have, for example, the two Virgin Islands, American and British, and Anguilla, but you do not have Mozambique and Guadaloupe and Saint Martin — I'm sorry?

MENON: You said Mozambique. Martinique.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm sorry. Martinique. And you don't have Saint Martin. Why is that? Why do you make the distinction?

SAMANA: Technically the colonies are the ones that are listed under the United Nations and are under consideration of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization. Second is that these colonies are governed or administered by administering authorities awaiting a process of socioeconomic development and political transition in a given time within which the peoples of the Territories make a clear cut decision, either through a plebiscite or a referendum by the total population, to determine their external political status.

LITTLEJOHNS: So in the case of Martinique, I should emphasize, and Guadaloupe, what is the situation there?

SAMANA: They are not listed as an agenda of the United Nations to be monitored and considered by the Committee of 24.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this because of the intervention of France, as some people might say, a colonial Power?

SAMANA: It's quite possible, but it is — again, it's not on the agenda. It is not an item to be considered by the Decolonization Committee, and technically therefore they don't come under the purview of the Committee's consideration.

LITTLEJOHNS: Yet attempts are made frequently to put Puerto Rico on your agenda. So far they've failed, I believe. What's the basis for that?

SAMANA: The basis for that is that there is a growing interest amongst the NGOs representing the views of the population in that particular location or population that would want to determine their political status, or are dissatisfied with present arrangements.

LITTLEJOHNS: But they've frequently decided in Puerto Rico to retain their present status. Why not accept the decision of the people of Puerto Rico?

SAMANA: That is the dilemma of Puerto Rico. You have those who would want to maintain the status quo, or the relationship with the United States, and who consider that the question of self-determination has already been determined and that the population of Puerto Rico would like to remain in association with the United States, and of course you have other political parties or groups within Puerto Rico who express the desire to make that decision alternatively.

WATSON: If I could comment on the sort of general point about the very existence of the Committee and its need, when the Committee was set up in the '60s there was a list of countries considered colonies. Now, most of those, or all of them, as far as I know, who want to become independent have now become so and have joined the United Nations, and the other Territories that you look at either by plebiscites or referenda or whatever have decided they're perfectly happy with their current status. So what on earth is the point of your Committee?

SAMANA: I'd like to take your point about your assertion that the populations of the Territories are quite happy. That is not the opinion of the members of the Committee or the opinion of myself as chairman of the Committee.

WATSON: But I mean, let me take, for example —

SAMANA: So —

WATSON: Okay.

SAMANA: Yes. That is not the opinion. We like to hear the views of the people, and those views must be expressed formally through the working process of the Committee. And that is the responsibility of the Committee, to monitor; under the mandate of the United Nations the United Nations must be involved. We heard in the introduction that one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations since the 50 years of its existence is decolonization. And after having achieved so much in decolonization, and we have a handful of 17-odd Territories yet to be decolonized, we can forget about those issues and forget about those peoples?

WATSON: Well, what about — I mean, I've actually visited one of them, the Falkland Islands; I went there a few years ago. And they — I mean, I talked to — it's not actually that difficult to talk to pretty much all of the people in the Falklands, and they are perfectly happy with their status. And I think that they actually find it positively unsettling to have a UN committee that raises this every year. Why not just take the Falklands off the Committee?

SAMANA: The issue of the Falkland Islands is the issue of sovereignty. And you would note, you would note in the resolution that the Committee resolves that the two countries who are disputing the question of sovereignty address the problem peacefully, and through bilateral means, in a peaceful manner, not militarily or —

WATSON: But I thought —

SAMANA: It's not an issue of decolonization in particular —

WATSON: But I thought the Committee —

SAMANA: — but it's a question of sovereignty.

WATSON: But I think the Committee —

SAMANA: And there is also an element — where the element of decolonization comes in is the fact that you have 2000 people, islanders, who have been living under the British administrational rule, or through British occupation, for the last 600 years. The question now is whether or not they have a right to determine their external political status, whatever the options available to them. Now, there is a growing question that a number of Committee members have raised and supported, which is very critical: whilst you have two countries fighting over the question of sovereignty, you have a growing interest of a population, 2000, who are saying that they have certain rights, after having lived on that island for the last 600 years.

WATSON: Well, I mean, do you think that self-determination is one of the principles? I mean, do they deserve the right of self-determination?

SAMANA: Yes, of course, they do deserve the right to self-determination. First, the fundamental question is their right to determine their external status. In other words, can they establish a sovereignty? If they cannot establish sovereignty, how can they continue their existence as a community and as a people within the international community? Either through association with a metropolitan Power or through relations with a congruent State — for example, Argentina — or a self-governing State with some kind of association with a former colonial Power. This is a critical question that the peoples of the Territories themselves have to address.

MENON: Could I —

SAMANA: It cannot be, if I may add, addressed by an outside agent, or some other people, or anybody else except the populations of the Territories themselves.

LITTLEJOHNS: But Ambassador, the UN is an outside agent in this case.

SAMANA: No, the UN is monitoring the process, because the UN is governed by its own mandate, by its own resolutions. By —

WATSON: So I'm still not quite clear why, if that, you know, no matter whether it's 1,000, 2,000 or 50,000, in the case of the Falklands — I just pick on this one particular place because I've actually been there — I mean, I can't quite see why, if they want to carry on the way they are, why they can't.

SAMANA: You'll notice that the Falkland Islanders would like to determine their ultimate status. They have an interest. Now, you're saying that there is not an issue? And so is the case with the rest of the other island populations of those non-sovereign Territories, that they would like to determine their status, that — you say that they're quite happy with the status quo. That is not the case that we observe in those cases.

MENON: Could I ask you, as a matter of clarification, you said the British have been there for 600 years. Is that true?

SAMANA: No, not 600 years, to correct that, about over 300 years.

MENON: 300 years.

SAMANA: Yes, 300 years.

MENON: All right. Proceeding now to the other point which you've raised, which is that the — you're waiting — the UN's interest is essentially that the people of the Territories should express themselves about their own future. Why has this not been possible in these 17 Territories? What's holding it up?

SAMANA: We find that the critical factors that are holding the process of expediting decolonization are of course the attitude and the policies of the administering authorities, which are crucially important. These administering authorities have a mandate under the United Nations, and as members of the United Nations are obligated to adhere to the principles of the United Nations to provide an avenue through which the people can express themselves and ultimately decide their future.

MENON: For instance, in the Falkland Islands, since that has been raised, if you should have a plebiscite next week and all 2,000 of them should have a free exercise of their vote under UN auspices, and they all said "We want to join Britain", that would, in your eyes, effectively resolve the matter?

SAMANA: It is interesting you raise the question of Falkland Islands, because if you note the attitude and the policies of the British Government as the administering authority, it seems that on the Falkland Islands they support the question of self-determination for the Islanders, the Falkland Islanders, but in the case of Gibraltar they are not clear, quite clear, on their position on Gibraltar, and they uphold the Treaty of Utrecht by saying that there is —

it's a question of sovereignty and it must be decided by two States, Spain and Britain, and it's not a question of self-determination. The British have a contradictory position.

MENON: Right. But on the Falkland Islands, since that was my question, if there is a plebiscite next week run under UN auspices that the British are allowing free exercise of the people's right to vote, that would in the eyes of the UN resolve the matter?

SAMANA: Exactly. Now —

MENON: Why has that not been possible? Have the British refused to have —

WATSON: The whole thing is pretty much academic; we know what they would vote for.

SAMANA: Exactly. The British would probably agree with that, but they're not agreeing with providing the same means for other island communities in other Territories.

MENON: But, no, but is the Committee linking Gibraltar with Falklands? If the British say to you tomorrow, "We are willing to have a vote on the Falkland Islands", will the Committee then link it to Gibraltar?

SAMANA: The only question, the critical question — the Committee is considering the issue before the agenda of the Committee, and that is the question of sovereignty. And the Committee's resolution is to encourage bilateral discussions between the two countries, two Powers, to resolve it amicably. So the question of self-determination is still not very clear, whether you deal with the sovereignty question first or the self-determination —

MENON: Let's just move away from the Falklands and go to any one of the other Territories —

SAMANA: Exactly.

MENON: — okay? — where if the administering Power says tomorrow that they'll have a free vote under UN auspices, that in your eyes would resolve the matter.

SAMANA: Exactly. Exactly.

MENON: Why has that not been done?

SAMANA: I just mentioned already —

MENON: No, I understand that the administering Powers have in fact been quite cooperative with the Committee.

SAMANA: Not exactly. Not exactly. The administering Powers have not, for instance, encouraged the UN visiting missions to assess — which is one of the functions of the Committee and the UN — to assess the level of political development, the level of constitutional development in those Territories, and whether or not they are adequately prepared to make that ultimate decision to determine their external political status.

WATSON: If I could broaden it out a bit, if you don't mind me coming in, I mean, I know that the — obviously the Committee was given the rules and the lists of whatever it was

given in the 1960s, but it does look a bit anti-Western that, for example, I mean, why doesn't the Committee consider Tibet? Tibet used to be an independent country and is now part of China. Seems there are lots of people in Tibet who'd love an opportunity to talk to the UN. Why doesn't the UN get up to date and discuss things like that?

SAMANA: Tibet is not an issue under the list of concerns for the Committee.

WATSON: I know.

LITTLEJOHNS: But why isn't it?

WATSON: But it would look — see what I mean, that the actual — the UN loves lists and committees and the old rules, and I know that they were there long before your time, Ambassador, but it would look a lot more credible and a lot less anti-Western if they said, well, you know, why not look at Tibet? I mean, why not look at Bougainville?

SAMANA: Well, you can look at the issue the other way. It seems that people, our concentration — you will find that a lot of Western NGOs concentrate on the integration of East Timor with Indonesia more so than raising the question of Guamese concern for self-determination, or the Turks and Caicos concern for self-determination, or other areas in the South Pacific, and New Caledonia, for that matter.

WATSON: But what about that other issue, though, just — sorry, Michael — I mean, why can't it kind of look at new areas? Like Tibet?

SAMANA: That is not the work of the Committee, to create new issues.

WATSON: Well, that's a shame.

SAMANA: It's not the work of the Committee. This is definitely not the work of the Committee. It's not mandated by the UN to carry out and to promote issues of decolonization, its job is to monitor existing colonies and whether or not they're moving forward to determine their future.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Utula Utuoc Samana, Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization.

Ambassador Samana, there are two quite large Territories, either in population or land area, namely East Timor and Western Sahara. Now, these are Territories which I believe are on your list. But your Committee is not doing very much about them because they seem to be the subject of activities by the Secretary-General and other institutions of the United Nations. Why is your Committee not involved in those questions?

SAMANA: It's simply because the Committee's not directly involved on these issues because of the sensitivity of the issues and because you have — the situation at the ground level is very critical. And in terms of security of the situation, it is quite sensitive.

LITTLEJOHNS: But it seems that your Committee has somewhat double — a double standard, because Rob has several times raised the question of the Falkland Islands, and that's

certainly a very sensitive situation; after all, Britain and Argentina went to war over the islands, yet you're very active in defending your posture on the Falkland Islands. Why not do the same with East Timor and Western Sahara?

SAMANA: We do allow the participation of East Timorese from both parties, both opinions, to express their views through the formal meetings of the Committee. So it is not a double standard on the part of the Committee; no, the Committee does address those issues, the Committee does provide the avenue for the peoples of East Timor from both parties to air their views through the Committee process.

LITTLEJOHNS: And Western Sahara?

SAMANA: And Western Sahara at the same time.

MENON: But last year, or only a few months ago, or last year, actually, the Office of Internal — the United States raised an issue which then the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the UN looked into, which was the holding of seminars and workshops by the Committee in rather nice resort areas in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. And is this a legitimate complaint? Are you in fact wasting the UN's money for very little cause?

SAMANA: It is not necessarily a waste of money. Decolonization is an issue; it's an existing programme of the United Nations, and the Committee is simply undertaking and implementing a programme of the United Nations. The United Nations has a declared target, to end colonialism by the year 2000. How do you go about ending colonialism by the year 2000? It needs the cooperation of all parties concerned. The administering authorities, the United Nations, working through its instrumentalities, of which C-24 is an important —

MENON: But why would you need to hold a workshop or a seminar —

WATSON: I mean, this — yeah, to follow up on his point, I mean, this is, if I quote from their report, seeing as he hasn't got it in front of him, the Internal Oversight Office said "Without a compelling and as yet unarticulated reason for continuing to hold these seminars, there is the appearance of a waste of limited UN resources, which, in the best interests of the UN, ought to be considered and explained publicly." Pretty harsh stuff.

SAMANA: If you read the report of the Committee in entirety, they do admit that the expenditure committed by the Committee is not an illegal expenditure. It is not illegal.

WATSON: They never said illegal, they just said it was a waste of money.

SAMANA: It says wasted, but it did not define carefully where it is a wastage. And as far as I am concerned, it is not a wastage. It's an effective use of the funds to provide an avenue through which the peoples of the Territories, especially the representatives of Territories, come and express their views in terms of whether or not the administering Powers are assisting them in their progress toward self-determination.

MENON: But so why do you have to hold them —

SAMANA: And it's perhaps the only avenue available to the peoples of the Territories and the C-24 —

WATSON: What's wrong with New York?

SAMANA: — in the absence, in the absence of visiting missions. And if the UN's role is to monitor, effectively monitor — very important — effectively monitor —

MENON: Right. But in the day —

SAMANA: — the progress of those Territories, then I see that it is not a waste of money, but the Committee working to support and to encourage and to defend the rights of the people.

MENON: But in the day of — when it's possible to teleconference, when it's possible to set up a satellite hook-up by which people in the entire region can appear on television and hear each other speak, why is it necessary to send a delegation to an area and pay for their hotel rooms, their first class transport? This is, I think, probably what is bothering a lot of people, because it is a time of financial crisis for the UN.

SAMANA: The villages of Guam, the villages of Turks and Caicos, the villages of New Caledonia do not want to have conferences through telecasts and through multimedia and so forth; they want to face the UN face to face and express in person.

MENON: You can face people face to face, if you teleconference. You can actually see someone and talk to them on a video screen. It is not as if they're talking to a non — to a machine. You can actually see each other and speak to each other. It is only that you don't have to pay for the hotel and for the transport.

SAMANA: If I may refer to the last seminar we had in Port Moresby, in 1995, or 1996, the representatives of the Territories, this is exactly what they said. They defended the status of the seminar, because they found the seminar is the only important avenue to which they come in person and represent the interests of the Territories, the peoples of the Territories, which is not fully represented by parties who are supposed to be adhering to the norms of the United Nations in making sure that the people are being assisted and being informed in terms of what options are available to them in determining their political future.

WATSON: Some of the administering Powers, to look at the make-up of the Committee, the UK and the US point — they say that your Committee doesn't have the normal geographical spread that a lot of other UN committees have, and they point to members on it like Syria and Iran and Cuba and think, well, these are hardly the countries to be kind of lecturing about self-determination and democracy.

SAMANA: The Committee is open to any member countries of the United Nations to join in.

WATSON: So you're just saying anyone — in that case, Western countries ought to apply —

SAMANA: I don't think one should be particularly pinpointing to certain countries because they're very vocal on issues that are very important on the agendas of the United Nations and very important for the peoples concerned.

WATSON: I mean — we will take that point, though, but if I was —

SAMANA: I ask you —

WATSON: — but I mean, if you take this point, if I was a Falkland Islander, and I was being — my fate was being — I don't know, not just a Falkland Islander, if I was from Guam or wherever else, and my fate was being pronounced upon by Iran and Syria, I might get a little bit hot under the collar about it.

SAMANA: I don't think you have followed carefully the work of the Committee. If you had followed carefully the work of the Committee you would realize that a number of countries have raised issues defending the rights of the Falkand Islanders in so far as the self-determination question is concerned. Fiji, for instance, Papua New Guinea, for example, and Trinidad and Tobago raised those questions.

WATSON: I mean, I wasn't thinking of the Falklands for any particular reason, it's just —

SAMANA: Now, there was no country, no other country, that has objected to or tried to undermine the rights of the Falkland Islanders.

MENON: This last year you have —

SAMANA: In the process of the Committee's work.

MENON: This last year for the first time the General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution on your Committee's work. Am I correct in that?

SAMANA: That's right.

MENON: That is correct. Does that imply an easier time for you in the future? And what —

SAMANA: We hope.

MENON: And the possibility that you might actually be able to resolve this matter?

SAMANA: We hope. There are outstanding issues yet to be resolved between the administering authorities and the Committee. For example, determining the methodology in which both the United Nations and the administering authorities and the people can recognize at what stage the people are ready and at what stage, at what point in time can we say that a Territory has achieved its self-determination. So it's very important. There are a lot of critical outstanding issues still yet to be resolved.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, you've spoken of the goal of ending colonialism by the year 2000. What do you mean by ending colonialism? Because, I mean, there are a number of countries, small countries, which probably could not be independent. They'd have to have something like their current status, and in some cases — for example, Bermuda, which is an extremely prosperous island not quite in the Caribbean, but farther north, has decided it's perfectly happy with its current status with the United Kingdom. So, I mean, why should the United Nations say such and such has to be done by the year 2000?

SAMANA: I am disturbed to hear people say that the islanders and the peoples in those Territories are quite happy with the status quo.

LITTLEJOHNS: But they've — in the case of Bermuda they voted to concede their status.

SAMANA: In the case of one particular Territory, the vote was done and then later on disputed. Because of a technicality. So it is not a question of a Government sponsoring plebiscites or popular consultations and popular voting that determines ultimately the constitutional status of those Territories. No. It is the plebescite conducted by the entire population with the UN monitoring. That is very important.

MENON: Could I ask you another prickly question for the UN, which is that, in the South Pacific, for instance, a number of the Territories that have in fact been decolonized are able to represent themselves at the UN only because Australia or New Zealand pays their rents in New York. How can this be called any kind of independence? How can they — how can the Governments of these Territories, of these small Territories, which are heavily dependent on the very colonial Powers which used to rule them, how can you call them independent?

SAMANA: Well, it's a question of external self-determination. After having determined their external self-determination, the work of internal self-determination, and that is the work of development, the work of developing the economy sustainably, remains a critical issue. And it is an agenda of the United Nations to develop regional entities, to develop regional cooperation, international cooperation, multilateral cooperation, addressing this very issue of an interdependent world where we must assist each other, helping those countries that are grappling with their development problems. So you can't say that these countries, because they cannot handle their economy, that they should not determine policies, internal policies of their nation, that they should not protect their interests by controlling immigration, inward immigration, or populations other than their own citizens. I find it very difficult to concede that.

WATSON: On one of the most explosive of all the decolonization issues, the one of East Timor, do you support the independence of East Timor, personally?

SAMANA: This is not a question of giving my personal opinion. I represent the Government of Papua New Guinea, and the Government of Papua New Guinea has a position on the East Timor question, and the C-24 has a position on the East Timor question. The C-24's position is to encourage bilateral discussions between Portugal and Indonesia to resolve this problem. The Government of Papua New Guinea does recognize that Portugal disappeared from the island at the time of the Second World War when the Japanese advanced, and then disappeared again at the time of the civil war in 1974, and still claims to be the authoritative administering authority of East Timor.

WATSON: But what about the —

LITTLEJOHNS: Rob, I'm afraid we have to — this has been quite an adversarial episode —

[LAUGHTER]

— edition of **World Chronicle**. Ambassador Samana, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

SAMANA: Thank you. Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Our guest has been Ambassador Utula Utuoc Samana, Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization. He was interviewed by Rob Watson of the BBC and Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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